

ARIADNE FLORENTINA.



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SIX LECTURES

ON

WOOD AND METAL ENGRAVING.

GIVEN BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
IN MICHAELMAS TERM, 1872.

BY

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V.—Design in the German Schools of Engraving.

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A D V I C E.

THE publication of these lectures has been delayed by some rearrangement of the text which I thought it advisable to make in order to bring the entire series at once into permanent form. There will in consequence be no changes made in subsequent editions, but a supplementary number, containing Appendix and two additional plates, will follow the six lectures already announced, at the same price as the illustrated ones; the entire series, unbound, thus costing its first subscribers only 14*s. 6d.* But after the publication of the last number it will be sold only in a bound form, constituting the seventh volume of the general series of my works, at 27*s. 6d.* per copy. The difficulty of providing these facsimile woodcuts, and some other of the illustrations, is so great that I must strictly limit the number of copies; and the market price, judging from that of my other books at present out of print, is not likely to fall below my publishing one.

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LECTURE V.

DESIGN IN THE GERMAN SCHOOLS OF
ENGRAVING.

141. **B**Y reference to the close of the preface to 'Eagle's Nest,' you will see, gentlemen, that I meant these lectures, from the first, rather to lead you to the study of the characters of two great men, than to interest you in the processes of a secondary form of art. As I draw my materials into the limited form necessary for the hour, I find my divided purpose doubly failing; and would fain rather use my time to-day in supplying the defects of my last lecture, than in opening the greater subject, which I must treat with still more lamentable inadequacy. Nevertheless, you must not think it is for want of time that I omit reference to other celebrated engravers, and insist on the special power of these two only. Many not inconsiderable reputations are founded merely on the curiosity of collectors of prints, or on partial skill in the management of processes; others, though resting on more secure bases, are still of no

importance to you in the general history of art; whereas you will find the work of Holbein and Botticelli determining for you, without need of any farther range, the principal questions of moment in the relation of the Northern and Southern schools of design. Nay, a wider method of inquiry would only render your comparison less accurate in result. It is only in Holbein's majestic range of capacity, and only in the particular phase of Teutonic life which his art adorned, that the problem can be dealt with on fair terms. We Northerns can advance no fairly comparable antagonist to the artists of the South, except at that one moment, and in that one man. Rubens cannot for an instant be matched with Tintoret, nor Memling with Lippi; while Reynolds only rivals Titian in what he learned from him. But in Holbein and Botticelli we have two men trained independently, equal in power of intellect, similar in material and mode of work, contemporary in age, correspondent in disposition. The relation between them is strictly typical of the constant aspects to each other of the Northern and Southern schools.

142. Their point of closest contact is in the art of engraving, and this art is developed entirely as the servant of the great passions which perturbed or polluted Europe in the fifteenth century. The

impulses which it obeys are all new ; and it obeys them with its own nascent plasticity of temper. Painting and sculpture are only modified by them ; but engraving is educated.

These passions are in the main three ; namely,

1. The thirst for classical literature, and the forms of proud and false taste which arose out of it, in the position it had assumed as the enemy of Christianity.
2. The pride of science, enforcing (in the particular domain of Art) accuracy of perspective, shade, and anatomy, never before dreamed of.
3. The sense of error and iniquity in the theological teaching of the Christian Church, felt by the highest intellects of the time, and necessarily rendering the formerly submissive religious art impossible.

To-day, then, our task is to examine the peculiar characters of the Design of the Northern Schools of Engraving, as affected by these great influences.

143. I have not often, however, used the word 'design,' and must clearly define the sense in which I now use it. It is vaguely used in common art-parlance ; often as if it meant merely the drawing of a picture, as distinct from its colour ; and in

other still more inaccurate ways. The accurate and proper sense, underlying all these, I must endeavour to make clear to you.

'Design' properly signifies that power in any art-work which has a purpose other than of imitation, and which is 'designed,' composed, or separated to that end. It implies the rejection of some things, and the insistence upon others, with a given object.*

Let us take progressive instances. Here is a group of prettily dressed peasant children, charmingly painted by a very able modern artist—not absolutely without design, for he really wishes to show you how pretty peasant children can be, (and, in so far, is wiser and kinder than Murillo, who likes

* If you paint a bottle only to amuse the spectator by showing him how like a painting may be to a bottle, you cannot be considered, in art-philosophy, as a designer. But if you paint the cork flying out of the bottle, and the contents arriving in an arch at the mouth of a recipient glass, you are so far forth a designer or signer; probably meaning to express certain ultimate facts respecting, say, the hospitable disposition of the landlord of the house; but at all events representing the bottle and glass in a designed, and not merely natural, manner. Not merely natural—nay, in some sense non-natural, or supernatural. And all great artists show both this fantastic condition of mind in their work, and show that it has arisen out of a communicative or didactic purpose. They are the Sign-painters of God.

I have added this note to the lecture in copying my memoranda of it here at Assisi, June 9th, being about to begin work in the Tavern, or Tabernaculum, of the Lower Church, with its variously significant four great 'signs.'

to show how ugly they can be); also, his group is agreeably arranged, and its component children carefully chosen. Nevertheless, any summer's day, near any country village, you may come upon twenty groups in an hour as pretty as this; and may see—if you have eyes—children in them twenty times prettier than these. A photograph, if it could render them perfectly, and in colour, would far excel the charm of this painting; for in it, good and clever as it is, there is nothing supernatural, and much that is sub-natural.

144. Beside this group of, in every sense of the word, 'artless' little country girls, I will now set one—in the best sense of the word—'artful' little country girl,—a sketch by Gainsborough.

You never saw her like before. Never will again, now that Gainsborough is dead. No photography,—no science,—no industry, will touch or reach for an instant this *super-naturalness*. You will look vainly through the summer fields for such a child. "Nor up the lawn, nor by the wood," is she. Whence do you think this marvellous charm has come? Alas! if we knew, would not we all be Gainsboroughs? This only you may practically ascertain, as surely as that a flower will die if you cut its root away, that you cannot alter a single touch in Gainsborough's work without injury to the

whole. Half a dozen spots, more or less, in the printed gowns of these other children whom I first showed you, will not make the smallest difference to them; nor a lock or two more or less in their hair, nor a dimple or two more or less in their cheeks. But if you alter one wave of the hair of Gainsborough's girl, the child is gone. Yet the art is so subtle, that I do not expect you to believe this. It looks so instinctive, so easy, so 'chanceux,'—the French word is better than ours. Yes, and in their more accurate sense, also, 'Il a de la chance.' A stronger Designer than he was with him. He could not tell you himself how the thing was done.

145. I proceed to take a more definite instance—this Greek head of the Lacinian Juno. The design or appointing of the forms now entirely prevails over the resemblance to Nature. No real hair could ever be drifted into these wild lines, which mean the wrath of the Adriatic winds round the Cape of Storms.

And yet, whether this be uglier or prettier than Gainsborough's child—(and you know already what I think about it, that no Greek goddess was ever half so pretty as an English girl, of pure clay and temper,)—uglier or prettier, it is more dignified and impressive. It at least belongs to the domain

of a lordlier, more majestic, more guiding and ordaining art.

146. I will go back another five hundred years, and place an Egyptian beside the Greek divinity. The resemblance to Nature is now all but lost, the ruling law has become all. The lines are reduced to an easily counted number, and their arrangement is little more than a decorative sequence of pleasant curves cut in porphyry,—in the upper part of their contour following the outline of a woman's face in profile, over-crested by that of a hawk, on a kind of pedestal. But that the sign-engraver meant by his hawk, Immortality, and by her pedestal, the House or Tavern of Truth, is of little importance now to the passing traveller, not yet preparing to take the sarcophagus for his place of rest.

147. How many questions are suggested to us by these transitions! Is beauty contrary to law, and grace attainable only through license? What we gain in language, shall we lose in thought? and in what we add of labour, more and more forget its ends?

Not so.

Look at this piece of Sandro's work, the Libyan Sibyl.*

* Plate X., Lecture VI.

It is as ordered and normal as the Egyptian's;—as graceful and facile as Gainsborough's. It retains the majesty of old religion; it is invested with the joy of newly-awakened childhood.

Mind, I do not expect you—do not wish you—to enjoy Botticelli's dark engraving as much as Gainsborough's aerial sketch; for due comparison of the men, painting should be put beside painting. But there is enough even in this copy of the Florentine plate to show you the junction of the two powers in it—of prophecy, and delight.

148. Will these two powers, do you suppose, be united in the same manner in the contemporary Northern art? That Northern school is my subject to-day; and yet I give you, as type of the intermediate condition between Egypt and England—not Holbein, but Botticelli. I am obliged to do this; because in the Southern art, the religious temper remains unconquered by the doctrines of the Reformation. Botticelli was—what Luther wished to be, but could not be—a reformer still believing in the Church: his mind is at peace; and his art, therefore, can pursue the delight of beauty, and yet remain prophetic. But it was far otherwise in Germany. There the Reformation of manners became the destruction of faith; and art therefore, not a prophecy, but a protest. It is the chief

work of the greatest Protestant who ever lived,* which I ask you to study with me to-day.

149. I said that the power of engraving had developed itself during the introduction of three new—(practically and vitally new, that is to say)—elements, into the minds of men: elements which briefly may be expressed thus:

1. Classicism, and Literary Science.
2. Medicine, and Physical Science.†
3. Reformation, and Religious Science.

And first of Classicism.

You feel, do not you, in this typical work of Gainsborough's, that his subject as well as his picture is 'artless' in a lovely sense;—nay, not only artless, but ignorant, and unscientific, in a beautiful way? You would be afterwards remorseful, I think, and angry with yourself—seeing the effect produced on her face—if you were to ask this little lady to

* I do not mean the greatest teacher of reformed faith; but the greatest protestant against faith unreformed.

† It has become the permitted fashion among modern mathematicians, chemists, and apothecaries, to call themselves 'scientific men, as opposed to theologians, poets, and artists. They know their sphere to be a separate one; but their ridiculous notion of its being a peculiarly scientific one ought not to be allowed in our Universities. There is a science of Morals, a science of History, a science of Grammar, a science of Music, and a science of Painting; and all these are quite beyond comparison higher fields for human intellect, and require accuracies of intenser observation, than either chemistry, electricity, or geology.

spell a very long word? Also, if you wished to know how many times the sevens go in forty-nine, you would perhaps wisely address yourself elsewhere. On the other hand, you do not doubt that *this lady** knows very well how many times the sevens go in forty-nine, and is more Mistress of Arts than any of us are Masters of them.

150. You have then, in the one case, a beautiful simplicity, and a blameless ignorance; in the other, a beautiful artfulness, and a wisdom which you do not dread,—or, at least, even though dreading, love. But you know also that we may remain in a hateful and culpable ignorance; and, as I fear too many of us in competitive effort feel, become possessed of a hateful knowledge.

Ignorance, therefore, is not evil absolutely; but, innocent, may be loveable.

Knowledge also is not good absolutely; but, guilty, may be hateful.

So, therefore, when I now repeat my former statement, that the first main opposition between the Northern and Southern schools is in the simplicity of the one, and the scholarship of the other, that statement may imply sometimes the superiority of the North, and sometimes of the South. You may have a heavenly simplicity

* The Cumæan Sibyl, Plate VII., Lecture VI.

opposed to a hellish (that is to say, a lustful and arrogant) scholarship; or you may have a barbarous and presumptuous ignorance opposed to a divine and disciplined wisdom. Ignorance opposed to learning in both cases; but evil to good, as the case may be.

151. For instance: the last time I was standing before Raphael's arabesques in the Loggias of the Vatican, I wrote down in my pocket-book the description, or, more modestly speaking, the inventory, of the small portion of that infinite wilderness of sensual fantasy which happened to be opposite me. It consisted of a woman's face, with serpents for hair, and a virgin's breasts, with stumps for arms, ending in blue butterflies' wings, the whole changing at the waist into a goat's body, which ended below in an obelisk upside-down, to the apex at the bottom of which were appended, by graceful chains, an altar, and two bunches of grapes.

Now you know in a moment, by a glance at this 'design'—beautifully struck with free hand, and richly gradated in colour,—that the master was familiar with a vast range of art and literature: that he knew all about Egyptian sphinxes, and Greek Gorgons; about Egyptian obelisks, and Hebrew altars; about Hermes, and Venus, and Bacchus, and satyrs, and goats, and grapes.

You know also—or ought to know, in an instant, —that all this learning has done him no good; that he had better have known nothing than any of these things, since they were to be used by him only to such purpose; and that his delight in armless breasts, legless trunks, and obelisks upside-down, has been the last effort of his expiring sensation, in the grasp of corrupt and altogether victorious Death. And you have thus, in Gainsborough as compared with Raphael, a sweet, sacred, and living simplicity, set against an impure, profane, and paralyzed knowledge.

152. But, next, let us consider the reverse conditions.

Let us take instance of contrast between faultful and treacherous ignorance, and divinely pure and fruitful knowledge.

In the place of honour at the end of one of the rooms of your Royal Academy—years ago—stood a picture by an English Academician, announced as a representation of Moses sustained by Aaron and Hur, during the discomfiture of Amalek. In the entire range of the Pentateuch, there is no other scene (in which the visible agents are mortal only) requiring so much knowledge and thought to reach even a distant approximation to the probabilities of the fact. One saw

in a moment that the painter was both powerful and simple, after a sort; that he had really sought for a vital conception, and had originally and earnestly read his text, and formed his conception. And one saw also in a moment that he had chanced upon this subject, in reading or hearing his Bible, as he might have chanced on a dramatic scene accidentally in the street. That he knew nothing of the character of Moses,—nothing of his law,—nothing of the character of Aaron, nor of the nature of a priesthood,—nothing of the meaning of the event which he was endeavouring to represent, of the temper in which it would have been transacted by its agents, or of its relations to modern life.

153. On the contrary, in the fresco of the earlier scenes in the life of Moses, by Sandro Botticelli, you know—not 'in a moment,' for the knowledge of knowledge cannot be so obtained; but in proportion to the discretion of your own reading, and to the care you give to the picture, you *may* know,—that here is a sacredly guided and guarded learning; here a Master indeed, at whose feet you may sit safely, who can teach you, better than in words, the significance of both Moses' law and Aaron's ministry; and not only these, but, if he chose, could add to this an exposition as

complete of the highest philosophies both of the Greek nation, and of his own; and could as easily have painted, had it been asked of him, Draco, or Numa, or Justinian, as the herdsman of Jethro.

154. It is rarely that we can point to an opposition between faultful, because insolent, ignorance, and virtuous, because gracious, knowledge, so direct, and in so parallel elements, as in this instance. In general, the analysis is much more complex. It is intensely difficult to indicate the mischief of involuntary and modest ignorance, calamitous only in a measure; fruitful in its lower field, yet sorrowfully condemned to that lower field—not by sin, but fate.

When first I introduced you to Bewick, we closed our too partial estimate of his entirely magnificent powers with one sorrowful concession—he could draw a pig, but not a Venus.

Eminently he could so, because—which is still more sorrowfully to be conceded—he liked the pig best. I have put now in your educational series a whole galaxy of pigs by him; but, hunting all the fables through, I find only one Venus, and I think you will all admit that she is an unsatisfactory Venus.* There is honest simplicity here; but you regret it; you miss something that you find in Holbein, much more in Botticelli. You

* Lecture III., p. 87.

see in a moment that this man knows nothing of Sphinxes, or Muses, or Graces, or Aphrodites; and, besides, that, knowing nothing, he would have no liking for them even if he saw them; but much prefers the style of a well-to-do English house-keeper with corkscrew curls, and a portly person.

155. You miss something, I said, in Bewick which you find in Holbein. But do you suppose Holbein himself, or any other Northern painter, could wholly quit himself of the like accusations? I told you, in the second of these lectures, that the Northern temper, refined from savageness, and the Southern, redeemed from decay, met, in Florence. Holbein and Botticelli are the purest types of the two races. Holbein is a civilized boor; Botticelli a reanimate Greek. Holbein was polished by companionship with scholars and kings, but remains always a burgher of Augsburg in essential nature. Bewick and he are alike in temper; only the one is untaught, the other perfectly taught. But Botticelli *needs* no teaching. He is, by his birth, scholar and gentleman to the heart's core. Christianity itself can only inspire him, not refine him. He is as tried gold chased by the jeweller,—the roughest part of him is the outside.

Now how differently must the newly recovered scholastic learning tell upon these two men. It

is all out of Holbein's way; foreign to his nature, useless at the best, probably cumbrous. But Botticelli receives it as a child in later years recovers the forgotten dearness of a nursery tale; and is more himself, and again and again himself, as he breathes the air of Greece, and hears, in his own Italy, the lost voice of the Sibyl murmur again by the Avernus Lake.

156. It is not, as we have seen, every one of the Southern race who can thus receive it. But it graces them all; is at once a part of their being; destroys them, if it is to destroy, the more utterly because it so enters into their natures. It destroys Raphael; but it graces him, and is a part of him. It all but destroys Mantegna; but it graces him. And it does not hurt Holbein, just because it does *not* grace him—never is for an instant a part of him. It is with Raphael as with some charming young girl who has a new and beautifully made dress brought to her, which entirely becomes her,—so much, that in a little while, thinking of nothing else, she becomes *it*; and is only the decoration of her dress. But with Holbein it is as if you brought the same dress to a stout farmer's daughter who was going to dine at the Hall; and begged her to put it on that she might not discredit the company. She puts it on to please

you ; looks entirely ridiculous in it, but is not spoiled by it,—remains herself, in spite of it.

157. You probably have never noticed the extreme awkwardness of Holbein in wearing this new dress ; you would the less do so because his own people think him all the finer for it, as the farmer's wife would probably think her daughter. Dr. Woltmann, for instance, is enthusiastic in praise of the splendid architecture in the background of his Annunciation. A fine mess it must have made in the minds of simple German maidens, in their notion of the Virgin at home ! I cannot show you this Annunciation ; but I have under my hand one of Holbein's Bible cuts, of the deepest seriousness and import—his illustration of the Canticles, showing the Church as the bride of Christ.

You could not find a subject requiring more tenderness, purity, or dignity of treatment. In this maid, symbolizing the Church, you ask for the most passionate humility, the most angelic beauty ; "Behold, thou art fair, my dove." Now here is Holbein's ideal of that fairness ; here is his "Church as the Bride."

I am sorry to associate this figure in your minds, even for a moment, with the passages it is supposed to illustrate ; but the lesson is too important to be omitted. Remember, Holbein represents the temper

of Northern Reformation. He has all the nobleness of that temper, but also all its baseness. He repre-



sents, indeed, the revolt of German truth against Italian lies; but he represents also the revolt of German animalism against Hebrew imagination. This figure of Holbein's is half-way from Solomon's mystic bride, to Rembrandt's wife, sitting on his knee while he drinks.

But the key of the question is not in this. Florentine animalism has at this time, also, enough to say for itself. But Florentine animalism, at this time, feels the joy of a gentleman, not of a churl. And a Florentine, whatever he does,—be it virtuous or sinful, chaste or lascivious, severe or extravagant,—does it with a grace.

158. You think, perhaps, that Holbein's Solomon's bride is so ungraceful chiefly because she is overdressed, and has too many feathers and jewels. No; a Florentine would have put any quantity of feathers and jewels on her, and yet never lost her grace. You shall see him do it, and that to a fantastic degree, for I have an example under my hand. Look back, first, to Bewick's Venus (Lect. III., p. 87). You can't accuse her of being overdressed. She complies with every received modern principle of taste. Sir Joshua's precept that drapery should be "drapery, and nothing more," is observed more strictly even by Bewick than by Michael Angelo. If the absence of decoration could exalt the beauty of his Venus, here had been her perfection.

Now look back to Plate II. (Lect. IV.), by Sandro; Venus in her planet, the ruling star of Florence. Anything more grotesque in conception, more unrestrained in fancy of ornament, you cannot find, even in the final days of the Renaissance. Yet Venus holds her divinity through all; she will become majestic to you as you gaze; and there is not a line of her chariot wheels, of her buskins, or of her throne, which you may not see was engraved by a gentleman.

159. Again, Plate V., opposite, is a facsimile of another engraving of the same series—the Sun in

Leo. It is even more extravagant in accessories than the Venus. You see the Sun's epaulettes before you see the sun; the spiral scrolls of his chariot, and the black twisted rays of it, might, so far as types of form only are considered, be a design for some modern court-dress star, to be made in diamonds. And yet all this wild ornamentation is, if you will examine it, more purely Greek in spirit than the Apollo Belvidere.

You know I have told you, again and again, that the soul of Greece is her veracity; that what to other nations were fables and symbolisms, to her became living facts—living gods. The fall of Greece was instant when her gods again became fables. The Apollo Belvidere is the work of a sculptor to whom Apollonism is merely an elegant idea on which to exhibit his own skill. He does not himself feel for an instant that the handsome man in the unintelligible attitude,* with drapery hung over his left arm, as it would be hung to dry over a clothes-line, is the Power of the Sun. But the Florentine believes in Apollo with his whole mind,

* I read somewhere, lately, a new and very ingenious theory about the attitude of the Apollo Belvidere, proving, to the author's satisfaction, that the received notion about watching the arrow was all a mistake. The paper proved, at all events, one thing—namely, the statement in the text. For an attitude which has been always hitherto taken to mean one thing, and is plausibly asserted now to mean another, must be in itself unintelligible.

V DESIGN IN THE



7

"Heat considered as a Mode of Motion."

Florentine Natural Philosophy

and is trying to explain his strength in every touch.

For instance ; I said just now, " You see the sun's epaulettes before the sun." Well, *don't* you, usually, as it rises ? Do you not continually mistake a luminous cloud for it, or wonder where it is, behind one ? Again, the face of the Apollo Belvidere is agitated by anxiety, passion, and pride. Is the sun's likely to be so, rising on the evil and the good ? This Prince sits crowned and calm : look at the quiet fingers of the hand holding the sceptre,—at the restraint of the reins merely by a depression of the wrist.

160. You have to look carefully for those fingers holding the sceptre, because the hand—which a great anatomist would have made so exclusively interesting—is here confused with the ornamentation of the arm of the chariot on which it rests. But look what the ornamentation is ;—fruit and leaves, abundant, in the mouth of a cornucopia. A quite vulgar and meaningless ornament in ordinary renaissance work. Is it so here, think you ? Are not the leaves and fruits of earth in the Sun's hand ? *

You thought, perhaps, when I spoke just now of the action of the right hand, that less than a depre-

* It may be asked, why not corn also ? Because that belongs to Ceres, who is equally one of the great gods.

sion of the wrist would stop horses such as those. You fancy Botticelli drew them so, because he had never seen a horse; or because, able to draw fingers, he could not draw hoofs! How fine it would be to have, instead, a prancing four-in-hand, in the style of Piccadilly on the Derby-day, or at least horses like the real Greek horses of the Parthenon!

Yes; and if they had had real ground to trot on, the Florentine would have shown you he knew how they should trot. But these have to make their way up the hill-side of other lands. Look to the example in your standard series, Hermes Eriophoros. You will find his motion among clouds represented precisely in this labouring, failing, half-kneeling attitude of limb. These forms, toiling up through the rippled sands of heaven, are—not horses;—they are clouds themselves, *like* horses, but only a little like. Look how their hoofs lose themselves, buried in the ripples of cloud; it makes one think of the quicksands of Morccambe Bay.

And their tails—what extraordinary tufts of tails, ending in points! Yes; but do you not see, nearly joining with them, what is not a horse tail at all; but a flame of fire, kindled at Apollo's knee? All the rest of the radiance about him shoots *from* him. But this is rendered *up* to him. As the fruits of the earth are in one of his hands,

its fire is in the other. And all the warmth, as well as all the light of it, are his.

We had a little natural philosophy, gentlemen, as well as theology, in Florence, once upon a time.

161. Natural philosophy, and also natural art, for in this the Greek reanimate was a nobler creature than the Greek who had died. His art had a wider force and warmer glow. I have told you that the first Greeks were distinguished from the barbarians by their simple humanity; the second Greeks—these Florentine Greeks reanimate—are human more strongly, more deeply, leaping from the Byzantine death at the call of Christ, "Loose him, and let him go." And there is upon them at once the joy of resurrection, and the solemnity of the grave.

162. Of this resurrection of the Greek, and the form of the tomb he had been buried in "those four days," I have to give you some account in the last lecture. I will only to-day show you an illustration of it which brings us back to our immediate question as to the reasons why Northern art could not accept classicism. When, in the closing lecture of Aratra Pentelici, I compared Florentine with Greek work, it was to point out to you the eager passions of the first as opposed to the formal legalism and proprieties of the other. Greek work, I told you, while

truthful, was also restrained, and never but under majesty of law ; while Gothic work was true, in the perfect law of Liberty or Franchise. And now I give you in facsimile (Plate VI.) the two Aphrodites thus compared—the Aphrodite Thalassia of the Tyrrhene seas, and the Aphrodite Urania of the Greek skies. You may not at first like the Tuscan best ; and why she is the best, though both are noble, again I must defer explaining to next lecture. But now turn back to Bewick's Venus, and compare her with the Tuscan Venus of the Stars, (Plate II.) ; and then here, in Plate VI., with the Tuscan Venus of the Seas, and the Greek Venus of the Sky. Why is the English one vulgar ? What is it, in the three others, which makes them, if not beautiful, at least refined ?—every one of them 'designed' and drawn, indisputably, by a gentleman ?

I never have been so puzzled by any subject of analysis as, for these ten years, I have been by this. Every answer I give, however plausible it seems at first, fails in some way, or in some cases. But there is the point for you, more definitely put, I think, than in any of my former books ;—at present, for want of time, I must leave it to your own thoughts.

163. II. The second influence under which engraving developed itself, I said, was that of medicine and



VI.

Fairness of the Sea and Air.
In VENICE and ATHENS.

the physical sciences. Gentlemen, the most audacious, and the most valuable, statement which I have yet made to you on the subject of practical art, in these rooms, is that of the evil resulting from the study of anatomy. It is a statement so audacious, that not only for some time I dared not make it to you, but for ten years, at least, I dared not make it to myself. I saw, indeed, that whoever studied anatomy was in a measure injured by it; but I kept attributing the mischief to secondary causes. It *can't* be this drink itself that poisons them, I said always. This drink is medicinal and strengthening: I see that it kills them, but it must be because they drink it cold when they have been hot, or they take something else with it that changes it into poison. The drink itself *must* be good. Well, gentlemen, I found out the drink itself to be poison at last, by the breaking of my choicest Venice glass. I could not make out what it was that had killed Tintoret, and laid it long to the charge of chiaroscuro. It was only after my thorough study of his Paradise, in 1870, that I gave up this idea, finding the chiaroscuro, which I had thought exaggerated was, in all original and undarkened passages, beautiful and most precious. And then at last I got hold of the true clue: "Il disegno di Michel Agnolo." And the moment I had dared to accuse that, it

explained everything ; and I saw that the betraying demons of Italian art, led on by Michael Angelo, had been, not pleasure, but knowledge ; not indolence, but ambition ; and not love, but horror.

164. But when first I ventured to tell you this, I did not know, myself, the fact of all most conclusive for its confirmation. It will take me a little while to put it before you in its total force, and I must first ask your attention to a minor point. In one of the smaller rooms of the Munich Gallery is Holbein's painting of St. Margaret and St. Elizabeth of Hungary,—standard of his early religious work. Here is a photograph from the St. Elizabeth ; and, in the same frame, a French lithograph of it. I consider it one of the most important pieces of comparison I have arranged for you, showing you at a glance the difference between true and false sentiment. Of that difference, generally, we cannot speak to-day, but one special result of it you are to observe ;—the omission, in the French drawing, of Holbein's daring representation of disease, which is one of the vital honours of the picture. Quite one of the chief strengths of St. Elizabeth, in the Roman Catholic view, was in the courage of her dealing with disease, chiefly leprosy. Now observe, I say *Roman* Catholic view, very earnestly just now ; I am not at all sure that it is

so in a Catholic view—that is to say, in an eternally Christian and Divine view. And this doubt, very nearly now a certainty, only came clearly into my mind the other day after many and many a year's meditation on it. I had read with great reverence all the beautiful stories about Christ's appearing as a leper, and the like; and had often pitied and rebuked myself alternately for my intense dislike and horror of disease. I am writing at this moment within fifty yards of the grave of St. Francis, and the story of the likeness of his feelings to mine had a little comforted me, and the tradition of his conquest of them again humiliated me; and I was thinking very gravely of this, and of the parallel instance of Bishop Hugo of Lincoln, always desiring to do service to the dead, as opposed to my own unmitigated and Louis-Quinze-like horror of funerals;—when by chance, in the cathedral of Palermo, a new light was thrown for me on the whole matter.

165. I was drawing the tomb of Frederick II., which is shut off by a grating from the body of the church; and I had, in general, quite an unusual degree of quiet and comfort at my work. But sometimes it was paralyzed by the unconscious interference of one of the men employed in some minor domestic services about the church. When

he had nothing to do, he used to come and seat himself near my grating, not to look at my work, (the poor wretch had no eyes, to speak of,) nor in any way meaning to be troublesome ; but there was his habitual seat. His nose had been carried off by the most loathsome of diseases ; there were two vivid circles of scarlet round his eyes ; and as he sat, he announced his presence every quarter of a minute (if otherwise I could have forgotten it) by a peculiarly disgusting, loud, and long expectoration. On the second or third day, just as I had forced myself into some forgetfulness of him, and was hard at my work, I was startled from it again by the bursting out of a loud and cheerful conversation close to me ; and on looking round, saw a lively young fledgling of a priest, seventeen or eighteen years old, in the most eager and spirited chat with the man in the chair. He talked, laughed, and spat, himself, companionably, in the merriest way, for a quarter of an hour ; evidently without feeling the slightest disgust, or being made serious for an instant, by the aspect of the destroyed creature before him.

166. His own face was simply that of the ordinary vulgar type of thoughtless young Italians, rather beneath than above the usual standard ; and I was certain, as I watched him, that he was not

at all my superior, but very much my inferior, in the coolness with which he beheld what was to me so dreadful. I was positive that he could look this man in the face, precisely because he could *not* look, discerningly, at any beautiful or noble thing; and that the reason I dared not, was because I had, spiritually, as much better eyes than the priest, as, bodily, than his companion.

Having got so much of clear evidence given me on the matter, it was driven home for me a week later, as I landed on the quay of Naples. Almost the first thing that presented itself to me was the sign of a travelling theatrical company, displaying the principal scene of the drama to be enacted on their classical stage. Fresh from the theatre of Taormina, I was curious to see the subject of the Neapolitan popular drama. It was the capture, by the police, of a man and his wife who lived by boiling children. One section of the police was coming in, armed to the teeth, through the passage; another section of the police, armed to the teeth, and with high feathers in its caps, was coming up through a trap-door. In fine dramatic unconsciousness to the last moment, like the clown in a pantomime, the child-boiler was represented as still industriously chopping up a child, pieces of which, ready for the pot, lay here

and there on the table in the middle of the picture. The child-boiler's wife, however, just as she was taking the top off the pot to put the meat in, had caught a glimpse of the foremost policeman, and stopped, as much in rage as in consternation.

167. Now it is precisely the same feeling, or want of feeling, in the lower Italian (nor always in the lower classes only) which makes him demand the kind of subject for his secular drama; and the Crucifixion and Pieta for his religious drama. The only part of Christianity he can enjoy is its horror; and even the saint or saintess are not always denying themselves severely, either by the contemplation of torture, or the companionship with disease.

Nevertheless, we must be cautious, on the other hand, to allow full value to the endurance, by tender and delicate persons, of what is really loathsome or distressful to them in the service of others; and I think this picture of Holbein's indicative of the exact balance and rightness of his own mind in this matter, and therefore of his power to conceive a true saint also. He had to represent St. Catherine's chief effort;—he paints her ministering to the sick, and, among them, is a leper; and finding it thus his duty to paint

leprosy, he courageously himself studies it from the life. Not to insist on its horror; but to assert it, to the needful point of fact, which he does with medical accuracy.

Now here is just a case in which science, in a subordinate degree, is really required for a spiritual and moral purpose: And you find Holbein does not shrink from it even in this extreme case in which it is most painful.

168. If, therefore, you *do* find him in other cases not using it, you may be sure he knew it to be unnecessary.

Now it may be disputable whether in order to draw a living Madonna, one need to know how many ribs she has; but it would have seemed indisputable that in order to draw a skeleton, one must know how many ribs *it* has.

Holbein is par excellence the draughtsman of skeletons. His painted Dance of Death was, and his engraved Dance of Death is, principal of such things, without any comparison or denial. He draws skeleton after skeleton, in every possible gesture; but never so much as counts their ribs! He neither knows nor cares how many ribs a skeleton has. There are always enough to rattle.

Monstrous, you think, in impudence,—Holbein for his carelessness, and I for defending him!

Nay, I triumph in him; nothing has ever more pleased me than this grand negligence. Nobody wants to know how many ribs a skeleton has, any more than how many bars a gridiron has, so long as the one can breathe, and the other broil; and still less, when the breath and the fire are both out.

169. But is it only of the bones, think you, that Holbein is careless?* Nay, incredible though it may seem to you,—but, to me, explanatory at once of much of his excellence,—he did not know anatomy at all! I told you in my Preface, already quoted, Holbein studies the face first, the body secondarily; but I had no idea, myself, how completely he had refused the venomous science of his day. I showed you a dead Christ of his, long ago. Can you match it with your academy drawings, think you? And yet he did not, and would not, know anatomy. *He* would not; but Durer would, and did:—went hotly into it—wrote books upon it, and upon ‘proportions of the human body,’ etc., etc., and all your modern recipes for painting flesh. How did his studies prosper his art?

* Or inventive! See Woltmann, p. 267. “The shin-bone, or the lower part of the arm, exhibit only one bone, while the upper arm and thigh are often allowed the luxury of two”!

People are always talking of his Knight and Death, and his Melancholia, as if those were his principal works. They are his characteristic ones, and show what he might have been, *without* his anatomy; but they were mere byeplay compared to his Greater Fortune, and Adam and Eve. Look at these. Here is his full energy displayed; here are both male and female forms drawn with perfect knowledge of their bones and muscles, and modes of action and digestion,—and I hope you are pleased.

But it is not anatomy only that Master Albert studies. He has a taste for optics also; and knows all about refraction and reflection. What with his knowledge of the skull inside, and the vitreous lens outside, if any man in the world is to draw an eye, here's the man to do it, surely! With a hand which can give lessons to John Bellini, and a care which would fain do all so that it can't be done better, and acquaintance with every crack in the cranium, and every humour in the lens,—if we can't draw an eye, we should just like to know who can! thinks Albert.

So having to engrave the portrait of Melancthon, instead of looking at Melancthon, as ignorant Holbein would have been obliged to do,—wise Albert looks at the room window; and finds it has four cross-bars in it, and knows scientifically

that the light on Melancthon's eye must be a reflection of the window with its four bars—and engraves it so, accordingly; and who shall dare to say, now, it isn't like Melancthon?

Unfortunately, however, it isn't, nor like any other person in his senses; but like a madman looking at somebody who disputes his hobby. While in this drawing of Holbein's, where a dim gray shadow leaves a mere crumb of white paper,—accidentedly it seems, for all the fine scientific reflection,—behold, it is an eye indeed, and of a noble creature.

170. What is the reason? do you ask me; and is all the common teaching about generalization of details true, then?

No; not a syllable of it is true. Holbein is right, not because he draws more generally, but more truly, than Durer. Durer draws what he knows is there; but Holbein, only what he sees. And, as I have told you often before, the really scientific artist is he who not only asserts bravely what he *does* see, but confesses honestly what he does *not*. You must not draw all the hairs in an eyelash; not because it is sublime to generalize them, but because it is impossible to see them. How many hairs there are, a sign painter or anatomist may count; but how few of them you can see, it

is only the utmost masters, Carpaccio, Tintoret, Reynolds, and Velasquez, who count, or know.

171. Such was the effect, then, of his science upon Durer's ideal of beauty, and skill in portraiture. What effect had it on the temper and quantity of his work, as compared with poor ignorant Holbein's! You have only three portraits, by Durer, of the great men of his time, and those bad ones; while he toils his soul out to draw the hoofs of satyrs, the bristles of swine, and the distorted aspects of base women and vicious men.

What, on the contrary, has ignorant Holbein done for you? Shakspere and he divide between them, by word and look, the Story of England under Henry and Elizabeth.

172. Of the effect of science on the art of Mantegna and Marc Antonio, (far more deadly than on Durer's,) I must tell you in a future lecture;—the effect of it on their minds, I must partly refer to now, in passing to the third head of my general statement—the influence of new Theology. For Durer and Mantegna, chiefly because of their science, forfeited their place, not only as painters of men, but as servants of God. Neither of them has left one completely noble or completely didactic picture; while Holbein and

Botticelli, in consummate pieces of art, led the way before the eyes of all men, to the purification of their Church and land.

173. III. But the need of reformation presented itself to these two men last named on entirely different terms.

To Holbein, when the word of the Catholic Church proved false, and its deeds bloody; when he saw it selling permission of sin in his native Augsburg, and strewing the ashes of its enemies on the pure Alpine waters of Constance, what refuge was there for *him* in more ancient religion? Shall he worship Thor again, and mourn over the death of Balder? He reads Nature in her desolate and narrow truth, and she teaches him the Triumph of Death.

But, for Botticelli, the grand gods are old, are immortal. The priests may have taught falsely the story of the Virgin;—did they not also lie, in the name of Artemis, at Ephesus;—in the name of Aphrodite, at Cyprus?—but shall, therefore, Chastity or Love be dead, or the full moon paler over Arno? Saints of Heaven and Gods of Earth!—shall *these* perish because vain men speak evil of them? Let *us* speak good for ever, and grave, as on the rock, for ages to come, the glory of Beauty, and the triumph of Faith.

174. Holbein had bitterer task.

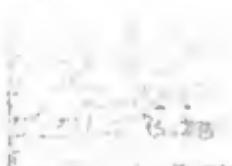
Of old, the one duty of the painter had been to exhibit the virtues of this life, and hopes of the life to come. Holbein had to show the vices of this life, and to obscure the hope of the future. "Yes, we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and fear all evil, for Thou art not with us, and Thy rod and Thy staff comfort us not." He does not choose this task. It is thrust upon him, —just as fatally as the burial of the dead is in a plague-struck city. These are the things he sees, and must speak. He will not become a better artist thereby; no drawing of supreme beauty, or beautiful things, will be possible to him. Yet we cannot say he ought to have done anything else, nor can we praise him specially in doing this. It is his fate; the fate of all the bravest in that day.

175. For instance, there is no scene about which a shallow and feeble painter would have been more sure to adopt the commonplaces of the creed of his time than the death of a child,—chiefly, and most of all, the death of a country child,—a little thing fresh from the cottage and the field. Surely for such an one, angels will wait by its sick bed, and rejoice as they bear its soul away; and over its shroud flowers will be

strewn, and the birds will sing by its grave. So your common sentimentalist would think, and paint. Holbein sees the facts, as they verily are, up to the point when vision ceases. He speaks, then no more.

The country labourer's cottage—the rain coming through its roof, the clay crumbling from its partitions, the fire lighted with a few chips and sticks on a raised piece of the mud floor,—such dais as can be contrived, for use, not for honour. The damp wood sputters; the smoke, stopped by the roof, though the rain is not, coils round again, and down. But the mother can warm the child's supper of bread and milk so—holding the pan by the long handle; and on mud floor though it be, they are happy,—she, and her child, and its brother,—if only they could be left so. They shall not be left so: the young thing must leave them—will never need milk warmed for it any more. It would fain stay,—sees no angels—feels only an icy grip on its hand, and that it cannot stay. Those who loved it shriek and tear their hair in vain, amazed in grief. 'Oh, little one, must you lie out in the fields then, not even under this poor torn roof of thy mother's to-night?'

176. Again: there was not in the old creed any





THE CHILD'S BEDTIME.
(Fig 5.) Fac-simile from Holbein's woodcut.



"HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR'
(Fig 6) Fac-simile from Holbein's woodcut.



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subject more definitely and constantly insisted on than the death of a miser. He had been happy, the old preachers thought, till then: but his hour has come; and the black covetousness of hell is awake and watching; the sharp harpy claws will clutch his soul out of his mouth, and scatter his treasure for others. So the commonplace preacher and painter taught. Not so Holbein. The devil want to snatch his soul, indeed! Nay, he never *had* a soul, but of the devil's giving. His misery to begin on his deathbed! Nay, he had never an unmiserable hour of life. The fiend is with him now,—a paltry, abortive fiend, with no breath even to blow hot with. He supplies the hell-blast *with a machine*. It is winter, and the rich man has his furred cloak and cap, thick and heavy; the beggar, bareheaded to beseech him, skin and rags hanging about him together, touches his shoulder, but all in vain; there is other business in hand. More haggard than the beggar himself, wasted and palsied, the rich man counts with his fingers the gain of the years to come.

But of those years, infinite, that are to be, Holbein says nothing. 'I know not; I see not. This only I see, on this very winter's day, the low pale stumbling-block at your feet, the altogether by you unseen and forgotten Death. You shall

not pass *him* by on the other side; here is a fasting figure in skin and bone, at last, that will stop you; and for all the hidden treasures of earth, here is your spade: dig now, and find them.'

177. I have said that Holbein was condemned to teach these things. He was not happy in teaching them, nor thanked for teaching them. Nor was Botticelli for his lovelier teaching. But they both could do no otherwise. They lived in truth and steadfastness; and with both, in their marvellous design, veracity is the beginning of invention, and love its end.

I have but time to show you, in conclusion, how this affectionate self-forgetfulness protects Holbein from the chief calamity of the German temper, vanity, which is at the root of all Durer's weakness. Here is a photograph of Holbein's portrait of Erasmus, and a fine proof of Durer's. In Holbein's, the face leads everything; and the most lovely qualities of the face lead in that. The cloak and cap are perfectly painted, just because you look at them neither more nor less than you would have looked at the cloak in reality. You don't say, 'How brilliantly they are touched,' as you would with Rembrandt; nor 'How gracefully they are neglected,' as you would with Gainsborough; nor 'How exquisitely they are shaded,'

as you would with Leonardo; nor 'How grandly they are composed,' as you would with Titian. You say only, 'Erasmus is surely there; and what a pleasant sight!' You don't think of Holbein at all. He has not even put in the minutest letter H, that I can see, to remind you of him. Drops his H's, I regret to say, often enough. 'My hand should be enough for you; what matters my name?' But now, look at Durer's. The very first thing you see, and at any distance, is this great square tablet with

"The image of Erasmus, drawn from the life
by Albert Durer, 1526,"

and a great straddling A.D. besides. Then you see a cloak, and a table, and a pot, with flowers in it, and a heap of books with all their leaves and all their clasps, and all the little bits of leather gummed in to mark the places; and last of all you see Erasmus's face; and when you do see it, the most of it is wrinkles.

All egotism and insanity, this, gentlemen. Hard words to use; but not too hard to define the faults which rendered so much of Durer's great genius abortive, and to this day paralyze, among the details of a lifeless and ambitious precision, the student, no less than the artist, of German blood. For too many an Erasmus, too many a Durer,

among them, the world is all cloak and clasp, instead of face or book; and the first object of their lives is to engrave their initials.

For us, in England, not even so much is at present to be hoped; and yet, singularly enough, it is more our modesty, unwisely submissive, than our vanity, which has destroyed our English school of engraving.

At the bottom of the pretty line engravings which used to represent, characteristically, our English skill, one saw always *two* inscriptions. At the left-hand corner, "Drawn by—so-and-so;" at the right-hand corner, "Engraved by—so-and-so." Only under the worst and cheapest plates—for the Stationers' Almanack, or the like,—one saw sometimes, "Drawn and engraved by—so-and-so," which meant nothing more than that the publisher would not go to the expense of an artist, and that the engraver haggled through as he could. (One fortunate exception, gentlemen, you have in the old drawings for your Oxford Almanack, though the publishers, I have no doubt, even in that case, employed the cheapest artist they could find.*) But in

* The drawings were made by Turner, and are now among the chief treasures of the Oxford Galleries. I ought to add some notice of Hogarth to this lecture in the Appendix; but fear I shall have no time: besides, though I have profound respect for Hogarth, as, in

general, no engraver thought himself able to draw; and no artist thought it his business to engrave.

But the fact that this and the following lecture are on the subject of design in engraving, implies of course that in the work we have to examine, it was often the engraver himself who designed, and as often the artist who engraved.

And you will observe that the only engravings which bear imperishable value are, indeed, in this kind. It is true that, in wood cutting, both Durer and Holbein, as in our own days Leech and Tenniel, have workmen under them who can do all they want. But in metal cutting it is not so. For, as I have told you, in metal cutting, ultimate perfection of Line has to be reached; and it can be reached by none but a master's hand; nor by his, unless in the very moment and act of designing. Never, unless under the vivid first force of imagination and intellect, can the Line have its full value. And for this high reason, gentlemen, that paradox which perhaps seemed to you so daring, is nevertheless deeply and finally true, that while a woodcut may be laboriously finished, a grand engraving on metal must be comparatively incomplete. For it must be done, throughout, with the

literature, I have for Fielding, I can't criticise them, because I know nothing of their subjects.

full fire of temper in it, visibly governing its lines, as the wind does the fibres of cloud.

The value hitherto attached to Rembrandt's etchings, and others imitating them, depends on a true instinct in the public mind for this virtue of line. But etching is an indolent and blundering method at the best; and I do not doubt that you will one day be grateful for the severe disciplines of drawing required in these schools, in that they will have enabled you to know what a line may be, driven by a master's chisel on silver or marble, following, and fostering as it follows, the instantaneous strength of his determined thought.

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